

FOREST HEALTH ALERT

From the Missouri Department of Conservation

Fall Webworm



Tree species affected: Caterpillars (larvae) of the fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*) feed on over 100 different species of deciduous trees. Walnut, hickory, pecan, persimmon, sweetgum, ash, maple, oak, poplar, redbud, and willow are commonly damaged.

Concerns: Defoliation by caterpillar feeding. Tent-like silken webbing covering branch tips.

Description: Fall webworm is a common, native moth found throughout North America. Adult moths do not damage trees, but caterpillars feed on foliage and spin silken webs around branch tips. Dozens of fall webworm caterpillars can be found within a single web. Webs start small and may eventually encompass 2-3 feet of a branch. Multiple branches can be affected. Occasionally, an entire tree will be enclosed in webbing. As caterpillars mature, they abandon their host tree and search for protected locations to pupate and overwinter. In some locations, hundreds of caterpillars have been reported crawling on siding, decks, and sidewalks.

Recommendation: Fall webworm control is rarely necessary as damage is mostly aesthetic and typically does not affect tree health. Defoliation late in the growing season causes much less stress on trees than similar damage in the spring since the arrival of autumn means trees will be losing their leaves soon. Maintaining good tree care practices, such as watering during dry periods, will go a long way in reducing stress on defoliated trees.

Fall webworm has dozens of natural enemies, from birds to parasitic wasps and flies, which act to reduce populations. To assist these natural enemies, rip open webs to expose caterpillars using a long stick with a nail driven through the end.

Chemical controls for fall webworm are available but must be applied when caterpillars are small. Products containing *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk), spinosad, acephate, carbaryl, or zeta-cypermethrin can be used when webs first begin to appear in July and August. Be sure that chemical sprays penetrate the webs. Use insecticides carefully to avoid impacts to beneficial insects. Never use fire to burn webs from trees, as this can severely damage twigs and buds.



Fall webworm tent on a pecan branch.



Tree enclosed in fall webworm silk.



Questions? Contact your local forester with the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Find contact information for your county and more at mdc.mo.gov.

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